

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02

SS-15 USIA-06 OES-07 /074 W

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P R 031038Z JUN 77

FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5154

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

CINCPAC

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USLO PEKING

C O N F I D E N T I A L HONG KONG 6413

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PBOR, PFOR, EFIS, CH, HK, UK, VN

SUBJ: VIETNAMESE ATTACK HONG KONG FISHING JUNK

SUMMARY: A REPORTED MAY 28 VIETNAMESE ATTACK ON A HONG KONG FISHING JUNK IN THE GULF OF TONKIN WILL PROBABLY FURTHER AGGRAVATE PRC CONCERNS OVER VIETNAMESE TERRITORIAL CLAIMS IN THE AREA. THE ATTACKED VESSEL COULD HAVE JUST AS EASILY COME FROM CHINA AND, INDEED, IS PROBABLY PRC-REGISTERED. THERE HAS BEEN NO CHINESE PUBLIC REACTION TO-DATE. END SUMMARY

1. BEGIN UNLCASSIFIED. ACCORDING TO LOCAL PRESS REPORTS, A HONG KONG FISHING JUNK RETURNED DURING THE EVENING OF MAY 31 AND REPORTED THAT ITS CAPTAIN HAD DIED AS A RESULT OF AN ATTACK BY A VIETNAMESE VESSEL . ON MAY 28 AT ABOUT 10:00 A.M. THE FAMILY-OPERATED 70-FOOT SHRIMP TRAWLER WAS REPORTEDLY LOCATED WEST OF HAINAN

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ISLAND IN THE GULF OF TONKIN FISHING FOR SHRIMP WHEN IT WAS APPROACHED BY A VIETNAMESE VESSEL. THE FISHING VESSEL APPARENTLY STARTED TO TURN AWAY WHEN, WITHOUT WARNING, THE VIETNAMESE OPENED FIRE WOUNDING THE SHIP'S MASTER, CHAN MUI. AFTER THE SHOOTING, APPROXIMATELY 10 PERSONS FROM THE VIETNAMESE VESSEL BOARDED THE TRAWLER AND TOOK IT TO LO FU (TIGER)

ISLAND WHERE A VIETNAMESE DOCTOR ATTENDED TO CHAN. ONE OF THE BORDERS TOLD THE CREW THAT THE TRAWLER HAD BEEN FISHING IN VIETNAMESE WATERS. THE TRAWLER AND CREW WERE KEPT AT THE ISLAND FOR A DAY AND THEN RELEASED. CHAN DIED ABOARD HIS VESSEL WHILE ENROUTE HOME. END UNCLASSIFIED.

2. BEGIN CONFIDENTIAL. BRITISH OFFICIALS PROVIDED THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION BASED UPON INTERVIEWS WITH THE CREW OF THE TRAWLER. THE INCIDENT TOOK PLACE "SOME 12 MILES" OFF THE COAST OF VIETNAM, SOUTHWEST OF HAINAN ISLAND AND THE VESSEL WAS PROBABLY IN VIETNAMESE TERRITORIAL WATERS AT THE TIME SINCE IT TOOK ONLY AN HOUR AND A HALF FOR THE VESSEL TO BE TOWED TO THE SRV ISLAND OF LO FU. (ACCORDING TO INFORMATION PROVIDED BY A ROYAL NAVY OFFICER TO USDLO, THE VIETNAMESE ISLAND TO WHICH THE TRAWLER WAS TAKEN WAS PROBABLY HON GIO ISLAND LOCATED VERY NEAR THE FORMER VIETNAMESE DMZ.) THE VESSEL WAS AT ANCHOR AT THE TIME OF THE INCIDENT. THE FAMILY ABOARD THE TRAWLER WAS NOT VERY COOPERATIVE IN PROVIDING INFORMATION TO THE HONG KONG AUTHORITIES AND THE HKG IS NOT COMPLETELY SATISFIED AS TO WHAT THE BOAT WAS REALLY DOING THERE. ALTHOUGH THE TRAWLER IS HONG KONG REGISTERED, THE HKG PRESUMES IT IS ALSO REGISTERED WITH THE PRC. (ABOUT 95 PER CENT OF THE HONG KONG FISHING VESSELS HAVE DUAL HK/PRC REGISTRATION.) A MESSAGE FROM THE BRITISH EMBASSY IN HANOI PLAYED DOWN THE INCIDENT POINTING OUT THAT THE AREA IN WHICH THE

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SHOOTING TOOK PLACE HAS BEEN A SCENE OF FISHING DISPUTES FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY AND THAT THE VIETNAMESE ARE ESPECIALLY SUSPICIOUS OF SMALL MOTORIZED VESSELS NEAR THEIR COAST WHICH MIGHT BE ENGAGED IN SMUGGLING REFUGEES. THE HKG BELIEVES THE CHINESE WOULD PREFER THAT THE MATTER BE LEFT TO THE PRC TO HANDLE. SINCE THE TRAWLER WAS PROBABLY IN SRV WATERS AND SINCE IT IS NOT CLEAR WHAT THE VESSEL WAS DOING, THE MOST THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT MIGHT DO IS TO PROTEST OVER THE EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE BY THE VIETNAMESE. THE FACTS OF THE INCIDENT HAVE BEEN REPORTED TO LONDON AND THE HKG AWAITS INSTRUCTIONS AS TO WHAT, IF ANY, ACTION IT SHOULD TAKE.

3. COMMENT: THIS INCIDENT, FOLLOWING AS IT DOES THE RECENT VIETNAMESE CLAIM OF A 12-MILE TERRITORIAL SEA LIMIT AND A 200-MILE ECONOMIC ZONE AND COINCIDING WITH THE RECONVENING OF THE LAW OF THE SEA CONFERENCE, MAY TAKE ON GREATER SIGNIFICANCE THAN IT MIGHT OTHERWISE. LITTLE PUBLIC REACTION IS EXPECTED FROM

THE HKG AND, IN ALL LIKELIHOOD, THE MATTER WILL BE
HANDLED IN A LOW-KEY MANNER THROUGH THE BRITISH
EMBASSY IN HANOI. THERE HAS BEEN NO CHINESE REACTION
OVER THIS INCIDENT THUS FAR, AND THEY MAY ALSO CHOOSE
TO IGNORE IT PUBLICLY. NEVERTHELESS, THE PRC IS
ALREADY DISTURBED BY VIETNAMESE CLAIMS OVER THE
SPRATLYS AND PARACELS AND UNDOUBTEDLY WILL NOT
OVERLOOK THE FACT THAT THE FISHING JUNK COULD HAVE
JUST AS EASILY BEEN FROM CHINA AS FROM HONG KONG.
END CONFIDENTIAL.
SULLIVAN

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Message Attributes

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